

Blessings Despite Hardship - Acts 14:1-7 – March 16th, 2008

- In chapter 13, Paul and Barnabas left Pisidian Antioch after being run out of town because of the fierce opposition and persecution.
- They shake the dust off their feet sort of in obedience to what the Lord said to do as a testimony against those in that town.

Luke 9:5 If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them."

- Here in chapter 14 they arrive in Iconium and start preaching the Gospel once again to both the Jews and Gentiles despite the difficulty.
- I believe that the text we have before us, is a teaching on and a lesson about how God sometimes packages blessing with hardship.
- Allow me to take it a step further; "not only does God package blessings with hardship, sometimes He blesses 'despite' hardship."

- Here in the text we have before us, we see the Paul and Barnabas experiencing God's blessing on this, their first missionary journey.
- However, in concert with God's blessing on them, they will suffer unspeakable hardship that will come against them.
- I believe there are a number of reasons why God allows this, and one reason is to keep us humbly dependent on Him.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider that God has made the one side by side with the other, so that man may not find out anything that shall be after him. AMP

- As we look at what happens once Paul and Barnabas arrive in Iconium, we can sort of make a few observations related to this.

1. Effectiveness despite persecution (Verse 1) - 2. Boldness despite opposition (Verse 2-3) - 3. Obedience despite division (Verse 4-7)

1. Effectiveness despite persecution (Verse 1)

1 **At Iconium** Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they **spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.**

- v1 Paul and Barnabas go into the Jewish synagogue and speak so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believe.
- If they had not been run out of Pisidian Antioch, because of the persecution, they may have not experienced this success in Iconium.
- Perhaps God allowed the persecution in Pisidian Antioch to move Paul on because he was prone to stay longer to strengthen a church.

Matthew 5:10-12 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. NIV

2. Boldness despite opposition (Verses 2-3)

2 But the Jews who refused to believe **stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.** 3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, **speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.**

- v2 The Jews who reject the gospel and refuse to believe, stir up the Gentiles and poison their minds by gossiping against the brothers.
- v3 So despite this, they spend more time there speaking boldly, and not only does the Lord bless this, He confirms this with miracles.

- One has to wonder why they spent so much time in a place with such opposition. Perhaps it was to model boldness they would need.
- They probably realized the need to stay and help the believers get grounded in order to stand strong in the face of such opposition.

3. Obedience despite division (Verses 4-7)

4 **The people of the city were divided;** some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. 5 There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. 6 **But they found out about it and fled** to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, 7 where they continued to preach the good news. v4-5 There is division amongst the Jews and the apostles, and they, together with their leaders, plot to kill them for preaching the gospel. v6-7 Paul & Barnabas find out and flee to Lystra and Derbe where they continue to preach the gospel. This is wisdom and obedience. - Paul and Barnabas are displaying prudence, and wisdom in their obedience to what Jesus commanded them to do when this happens.

Matthew 10:23 When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. NIV

"Paul might be knocked down, but he was not knocked out. No foe could daunt him, no fear could haunt him. They could throw him out of Pisidian Antioch and chase him out of Iconium, but they could not stop him from preaching. "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16) was his motto. There was no place where Paul was afraid to preach the gospel. He preached the gospel in Athens, the intellectual capital of the world, and was mocked; he preached the gospel at Jerusalem, the religious capital of the world, and was mobbed; he preached the gospel at Rome, the political capital of the world, and was martyred. But he preached the gospel. So Paul dealt with the danger of dissension. He refused to be intimidated by the opposition to the gospel." John Phillips "Exploring Acts" p 278

Nehemiah 6:1 When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it-though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates- 2 Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me; 3 so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" 4 Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer. NIV